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Letter dated 16 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit a comprehensive statement issued today, 16 June, by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the State of Eritrea in response to a resolution of the Ethiopian Parliament adopted on 13 June 2000 concerning the human rights of Ethiopians living in Eritrea (see annex). This statement not only responds to Ethiopia's false allegations, but also exposes Ethiopia's gross human rights abuses, which it has perpetrated and continues to perpetrate with impunity, on the people of Eritrea and Ethiopian citizens of Eritrean origin over the past two years.

I should be grateful if you would kindly circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 116 (a) and (d), and of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Haile **Menkerios**
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 16 June 2000 from the Permanent Representative of Eritrea to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Response of the Government of the State of Eritrea to the resolution adopted by the Council of the People's Representatives of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia on 13 June 2000

1. On 13 June 2000, the Council of the People's Representatives of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (i.e. the Ethiopian Parliament) issued a resolution on the purported violation of the human rights of Ethiopians living in Eritrea.

2. This resolution was issued only a few weeks after the international community has been alerted by the Government of Eritrea of the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Ethiopian army as it was being evicted from areas of Eritrea which it had temporarily occupied as a result of its latest aggression in mid-May 2000. It also comes as the OAU and the international community seem to be enforcing the acceptance of a peace plan to end the two (2) year old conflict. It is not difficult to conclude that the twin purposes of this resolution are to, on the one hand, create yet another pretext to torpedo the OAU peace plan and, on the other, create a convenient subterfuge to dissipate guilt by portraying Eritrea as an equally guilty party. By this subterfuges, Ethiopia hopes to convince the world to condemn Eritrea along with Ethiopia.

3. It is a matter of public record that, during the two (2) years of the conflict, Ethiopia has been systematically and willfully violating the human rights of not only Eritreans but also of Ethiopians of Eritrean origin. It had deported more than seventy thousand (70,000) without any due process of law, detained more than one thousand five hundred (1500) Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin in hostile internment camps like Didessa, caused the disappearance of two thousand (2000),

deprived individuals of their citizenship in an arbitrary and discriminatory manner, subjected the victims to inhumane and degrading treatment and torture, separated families, and confiscated homes, shops and other property without compensation. These violations have been severely denounced by several credible NGOs, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

It is also a matter of public record that the Ethiopian Air force has systematically bombed Eritrean villages, towns and ports, killing many innocent people including women and children and destroying civilian infrastructure, cattle and farms. There have also been many extra-judicial killings.

4. The Government of Ethiopia has been able to commit its crimes with impunity only because the international community had preferred to remain silent, except on a few occasions, in the face of these blatant violations in spite of repeated requests by the Eritrean Government and people as well as protests, and expressions of denunciation, by numerous other members of the international community, including in particular the relevant human rights NGOs. It is therefore a mockery of the principles and norms of human rights and a scathing commentary on the values held by the international community that Ethiopia, which had so systematically and brutally trampled on all the human rights conventions as well as the Geneva Conventions and the protocols, should now refer to, and appeal in the name of, the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and other international human rights instruments as well as the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949. But then, is it not said that "the devil can cite scripture for his purpose....[and] and an evil soul produces holy witness"?

5. The false and absurd charges made by the Ethiopian Parliament that the Eritrean Government and people are committing human rights violations against Ethiopians residing in Eritrea is yet another clumsy attempt by the Ethiopian Government to cover up its most recent horrendous war crimes and human rights violations which, *inter alia*, included the razing of villages, pillaging, looting, destruction of farms, shops, hotels, gas-stations, garages and other private property as well as kidnapping, murder and rape. These crimes have been observed by eyewitnesses from the international community and media and recorded for posterity and study by any interested party.

The Government of Ethiopia is responsible, and will have to account, for these latest criminal acts as well as previous violations of human rights, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes against peace. It becomes obvious that the Ethiopian Parliament which, by acting as the devil's chaplain, has become an accomplice to the crimes of the executive branch and shall be held equally responsible and accountable for the crimes. If the Ethiopian Parliament were really concerned on the respect of human rights, it should have investigated the violations committed by the executive branch to pass a motion of censure and due apology to the Eritrean people.

6. In this connection it must be noted that the Eritrean National Assembly (i.e. Parliament) had on 26 June 1998, right at the beginning of the conflict, issued a clear declaration which stated that "*the Eritrean Government has not, and will not, take any hostile action against Ethiopians residing in the country. Their right to live and work in peace is guaranteed. If this right is infringed under any circumstances or by any institution, they have the full right of redress. This policy that can see a horizon beyond the conflict of today will not change even if the crises deteriorates to any degree.*"

It is also a matter of public record that the most prominent and credible human rights agencies have, during the past two years consistently reported that, by and large, the Eritrean Government had protected the human rights of Ethiopians residing in Eritrea and had repeatedly dismissed such Ethiopian charges. A cursory review of any of these reports will reveal that all Ethiopian charges against Eritrea have been followed by statements like "*Amnesty International has found no eyewitness accounts or independent corroboration of this incident*". The 1999 Country Report on Eritrea by the US Department of State is also replete with the reminder that "*Investigations of the Ethiopian allegations by international human rights groups and local and foreign officials revealed no evidence to substantiate the charges*".

On the other hand, almost all human rights agencies confirm the Human Rights Watch Report of 1999 that "*compelling evidence pointed to a deliberate campaign by the Ethiopian authorities to expel Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin to Eritrea*".... and that "*the deportations and accompanying violations of a range of rights of the deportees also*

violated Ethiopia's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other human rights treaties it has ratified and indeed incorporated into the law of the land". It must also be recalled that the OAU Committee of Ambassadors which visited both Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1998 had concluded that Ethiopia has systematically violated the human rights of Eritreans residing in Ethiopia while Eritrea had scrupulously protected the rights of Ethiopians residing in Eritrea.

The Ethiopian Government has not denied the commission of the crimes. Indeed, it was the Prime Minister himself who, in an interview with Radio Ethiopia on 9 July 1998, declared that if his government were to say to any foreigner "*Go, because we do not like the color of your eyes they have to leave*". Thus, the statement from the Ethiopian Parliament seems to suggest that the international conventions apply to others while Ethiopia can contemptuously trample them.

It is for this reason that any Ethiopian accusations that the Government and people of Eritrea have systematically attacked Ethiopian civilians and otherwise violated their human rights cannot be taken seriously. Would it be credible that a government which has restrained itself from any retaliatory acts during the worst days of the Ethiopian Government's violations of the rights of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin to act so irrationally on the eve of the presumed signing of a peace plan which provides for the investigation of human rights?

7. It is true that there are Ethiopian nationals in shelters for the displaced in Shiketti, Adi Keih and other places in Eritrea. These Ethiopians are a component of the displaced populations from Eritrean villages and towns which have been militarily attacked by Ethiopia and, having suffered the fate of their Eritrean neighbors, are now living in the same shelter that have become the temporary abodes of their Eritrean counterparts, are faced with the same problems and predicaments that confront the Eritreans and benefit from exactly the same assistance that the Eritreans are receiving. This has been verified by members of the international community, including the ICRC, and are there to be visited by any party. It is also true that the Eritrean Government is, with the collaboration of the ICRC, finalizing the necessary arrangements to expedite the **voluntary** departure of Ethiopians that have decided of their own free will to return to Ethiopia. It must also be recognized that

the Eritrean Government may, when it finds it unavoidable, also have to take the appropriate legal steps to repatriate Ethiopians residing in Eritrea on a case by case basis to their state of origin.

8. There is no denying that very few Eritrean youth have, after being provoked and taunted by some Ethiopians, rashly and emotionally taken the law into their hands after hearing of Ethiopian's latest aggression. It is a tribute to the Government of Eritrea that it took swift and resolute action to end these illegalities, including the public denunciation of the acts and warnings against any similar action in the future, and to contain what may have developed into an ugly situation with very sad consequences. It also took the necessary legal steps to ensure the safety and security of Ethiopians that may have needed it. This too has been verified- and can be confirmed by- the members of the international community.

9. In this connection, it must be stated for the record that, throughout the last two (2) years of conflict, the Eritrean Government and its representatives had repeatedly invited the international community, and particularly the OAU and the UN human rights mechanisms at all levels, to send missions or to appoint rapporteurs to investigate the human rights conditions of Ethiopians in Eritrea and of Eritreans in Ethiopia. The Eritrean Government and its representatives have, at the same time, persistently requested their Ethiopian counterparts to join them in extending similar invitations. The request had always been ignored. It is therefore good news that the Ethiopian Parliament has invited the relevant UN Mechanisms to appoint a Special Rapporteur. It is welcomed by the Eritrean Government if the Special Rapporteur's mandate will also include the investigation of the violations of the human rights of Eritreans and Ethiopians of Eritrean origin in Ethiopia since 1998.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Asmara
16 June 2000